

will be noticed in Colonel Meinertzhagen's account of his trip to Ladakh (*Ibis*, 1927, p. 421) that he found *S. althaea* to be the common breeding bird of the Indus, Shyok and Nubra Valleys. Mr. Osmaston's mistake was of course due to his hurried departure for Africa before he could make a fresh examination of his skins, but I can only end by urging that for the present no egg collector in India, Cashmere or Baluchistan will name any Whitethroat's eggs without a skin from the nest to support his identification.

CALDBEC HOUSE,
BATTLE,
August 30, 1927.

HUGH WHISTLER.

XXVI.—AN ALBINO TURTLE

On June 25, I secured a specimen of the Common Mud Turtle of these parts, *Emyda granosa intermedius*, Annandale, which is apparently an albino. It was a half-grown specimen and was bright yellow throughout with the exception of the limbs and neck which were chrome yellow. The plastron had the usual colourless appearance. It was taken in the Ambajheri Tank at Nagpur and is deposited in the Nagpur Museum. (Reptile No. 274.)

NAGPUR, C. P.,
August 17, 1927.

E. A. D'ABREU, F.Z.S.

XXVII.—NOTES ON THE DESERT MONITOR (*VARANUS GRISEUS*) AND THE SPINY TAILED LIZARD (*UROMASTIX MICROLEPIS*)

The following field notes may be of interest: they have been compiled from observation and the experience of Bedouin hunters. Most of the facts were obtained from Nahaita, an Araif tribesman, who has spent most of his thirty years or so of life hunting the wild animals of the Shamiyah Desert, and Radam, who has had a similar career. For their truth I cannot vouch, but both men are now in the Camel Police and are models of reliability when reporting, and of observation and knowledge when anything relating to the local stretches of Iraq and Najd is under discussion.

The Desert Monitor (*V. griseus*) locally known as the *harwhal*, ranges in adults from twelve to twenty inches in length. It is so called because it is never seen travelling at any other pace but that of a fast wriggling run. I have myself, however, seen them travelling at what could only be termed a slow stumbling crawl but this was in about twelve square feet of confinement.

They are easily overtaken by a running man. When neared, they stop, turning their heads with mouths wide open in the direction of their pursuers. They then lash their tails furiously from side to side and shoot their tongues in and out at the same time hissing loudly. If foot or stick is approached more closely to them, they will make sudden darts snapping fiercely at the offending object, and although the only result is bleeding and broken teeth, they persist in doing the same thing repeatedly.

I have found that the best way to catch them is by a sharp kick under the belly which bowls them over, a foot placed quickly on the head then enables one to pick them up by the tail when a noose may be easily passed over the head and up to the waist. I have never seen them biting the line that holds them captive.

These reptiles are found in the Shamiyah Desert and also in the Gizerah region between the Tigris and Euphrates. They prefer sandy places especially with mounds or undulations, and it is only when these are present that they are found in Subakha, a salt mud of treacherous consistency found in patches of varying size in the local desert.

Though they sometimes dig their own burrows, they more usually adopt the disused holes of other animals such as rats and jerboas. When its own excavation, the shaft is driven in at an angle of about forty-five degrees to a distance of roughly eighteen inches, the sunken end being expanded into a chamber. The outlet remains single.

They are said to feed on the surface only, never taking food below ground. No vegetation is eaten and they dislike water. Their food consists of crickets, small lizards and local desert snakes.

Of the pairing of the *harwhal* nothing is known, they are always seen single. The female is similarly coloured to the male, that is with straw coloured belly, and back of a greenish-grey ground with darker mottling. The belly of the male I have noticed has a pinkish tinge in early summer. The female is slightly smaller.

It is said not to hibernate, and as a fact is seen much more frequently in winter all day long than in summer when it is seen in early morning and late evening only. It apparently objects to more than moderate heat and this is borne out by its behaviour in captivity. At night and when not directly under the sun's rays it lay contentedly in the centre of its cage, but when the sun shone directly upon it, great unrest was evinced and it was not happy until a crack or cranny had been found into which at least its head might be pushed.

It is not venomous. I have been bitten and so has my spaniel. There was a very small puncture, little blood and no subsequent reaction of any sort. It is not eaten by the Arab.

The eggs are laid in the burrow chamber and number fifteen to thirty. They are described as being of the size of a pigeon's egg and are white spotted with brown. The young are similar in colour and appearance to the adult.

Both belly and throat swell when the animal hisses, the maximum of hiss and swelling occur together.

The only folklore obtainable was, that the tribes say that if the teats of goats and ewes are found swollen, the recent pastures are searched and a *harwhal* is invariably found in the vicinity. They say that it hangs on to the teats and drinks the milk. The tribes admit that no teeth marks are ever found. In captivity they do not touch milk.

The 'thub' or Spiny-tailed Lizard (*U. microlepis*) has the head of the ordinary lizard to the eye of the lay observer, but its body is almost as broad as it is long. The tail is relatively short but

tremendously thick and carries fifteen to twenty horny spikes which project backwards and slightly outwards from the main stem. I cannot appreciate its utility; as a weapon it is absurd, and as a boring instrument if it is true that the 'thub' burrows head first, it is at the wrong end of the machine.

My informants say that it gets its name from its never moving from the one place. It is found all over the Shamiyah Desert but only where stony outcrops occur and is not found at all in the Gizerah.

Its burrow descends vertically in a medium spiral to a depth of about four feet, a horizontal off-shoot near the surface in the female burrow containing the eggs. The burrows are occupied singly and have one outlet.

Unlike the *harwhal* the 'thub' eats vegetation but of no particular sort. It also eats crickets and it is generally averred that the female thub watches her eggs hatch not from maternal solicitude but in order to eat them.

They hibernate in December and January and are much sligher in February.

They breed in April and May. The female is said at this season to protrude her rear half from her burrow at the same time slowly waving her tail. This attracts passing males who signify their presence by hissing. Hunters often catch a female thub by approaching gently while she is thus employed and imitating the hiss of the male. The female leaves her hole and is then an easy capture. Coitus is by ventral apposition; the pair do not associate for a time longer than is necessary for the act. Most males are darkly coloured similar to the *harwhal* but there are some much lighter. All females are light.

The eggs which are white are thirty to forty in number and are compared in size and shape to small dates. They are laid in the female's burrow and as stated previously are hatched for the table. Whether she eats only a proportion or all that cannot escape is unknown. Both reptiles and eggs are eaten by the Arab.

They are not venomous, and ripe old age, longer than man, is said to be their destiny if they escape the desert hunters. The commonest method of catching them is to pour water down their holes when they promptly emerge.

Their throats and bellies distend when they hiss as in the *harwhals*.

NASIRIYAH,

IRAQ,

September 9, 1927.

NORMAN L. CORKILL.

XXVIII.—HAMADRYADS IN THE KUMAON TERAİ

I saw two hamadryads in my shooting block. Neither of them seriously showed much fight. The first one made off through jungle; I was within 10 yards of it when first seen.